

World Food Day 2019
"Healthy Diets for a #ZeroHunger World"

INTERACTIVE PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE THEME OF THE WORLD FOOD DAY 2019

Welcome remarks from the World Council of Churches

Dear Esteemed representatives of nations in Geneva, leaders and officials of international organizations, members of civil society and faith communities, students, friends and colleagues,

WELCOME!

It is our great privilege to cohost this vital and timely panel discussion on the theme - "Healthy Diets for a Zero Hunger World" along with the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Programme. We are privileged to host you here at the Ecumenical Centre!

We are deeply grateful to Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett, director, of FAO in Geneva, for her leadership and for co-moderating this session. We are also privileged to have the eminent authorities on the key topics to shed light for this critical discussion.

Dr Francesco Branca, director, Department of Nutrition for Health and Development, at the World Health Organization, Ana Maria Suarez-Franco, the permanent representative of FIAN International,

Your excellency Cheryl Spencer, ambassador and permanent representative to the UN for Jamaica,

Gordana Jerger, director, World Food Programme, Geneva, and

Ludovic Larbodière, senior expert for Agriculture and Environment, IUCN.

We look forward to your contributions and insights. We are also glad to have each one of you, for committing your precious time to participate and contribute to this discussion.

On 16 October, we commemorated the World Food Day with the theme "Healthy Diets for a Zero Hunger World". For the whole of last week, faith-based organizations located here at the Ecumenical Centre celebrated the Churches' Week of Action on Food. We celebrated the week through our actions, prayers and reflections.

Therefore, I would like to emphasize the commitment and the critical role of key organizations in this center - the World Council of Churches, the ACT Alliance, Lutheran World Federation and its Department for Mission and Development, in making a significant difference in the lives of the millions of people in all regions of the world in the area of access

to food, land, water and resources. They journey with communities, in their efforts for sustainable livelihoods to lead fulfilling lives.

We look forward to the input and discussions, as we have to reflect on why, amidst plenty and abundance, 26.4% of the world population, amounting to about 2 billion people continue to experience hunger and moderate to severe levels of food insecurity! A similar proportion of people in the world are also consuming contaminated drinking water. We have to reflect why we are increasingly trapped in a combination of unhealthy diets and sedentary lifestyles leading to obesity and non-communicable diseases. It is evident that unhealthy diets and lifestyles are often not only dependent on the choice of individuals. Poverty, inequity, lack of access to land and resources, conflicts, climate change, compromising food sovereignty and self-determination, are all linked directly to how people access nutritious food and lead healthy lives.

Apart from intervening and providing succor and support in times of conflicts, disasters and chronic and acute food shortages, our organizations are deeply involved in the sustainable development of communities and building their resilience in facing various challenges. We are also deeply involved in advocacy, raising difficult questions and following through for policy change, in solidarity with civil society and people's movements. Our organizations are also engaged with helping communities, sharing their agency and wisdom and in promoting education and formation to face many of these challenges.

The WCC's Food for Life Campaign; the programme on Health Promoting Churches; resources such as the "Roadmap for Congregations, Communities and Churches for an Economy of Life and Ecological Justice;" and the "10 Commandments of Food", are all aimed at equipping congregations and local communities as catalysts for societal transformation to overcome hunger, poverty and ill-health.

But we are convinced that we can journey ahead with success, only if we hold hands and move forward with all of you! Let us work together, bringing the knowledge and experiences, in a coherent and holistic manner, so that all people can realise their right to adequate food and nutrition - a commitment, that all nations have already pledged to follow up. May we achieve it so that one and all can enjoy the full lives that God has assured us of.

I look forward to the presentations and the ensuing discussion!

Thank you.